

Professional Doctorates: Challenges and Opportunities

O'Kelly, C. (2018). *Professional Doctorates: Challenges and Opportunities*. Paper presented at Irish Association of Law Teachers Conference 2018, Athlone, Ireland.

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Professional Doctorates

Challenges and Opportunities

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24 November 2018

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- What are professional doctorates and what are they *not*?
- Why are they growing in number?
- Who wants to take a professional doctorate?
- How ought a curriculum be designed in response?

Structured doctorates in Law in Ireland

1. UCD: PhD in European Law and Governance
<https://www.ucd.ie/law/study/graduateprogrammes/phdineuropeanlawandgovernance/>
2. NUI Galway: Structured PhD (Law)
<https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/study-maynooth/postgraduate-studies/courses/phd-law>
3. Queen's University Belfast: JD (and DGov)
 - 3.1 <https://www.qub.ac.uk/schools/SchoolofLaw/Study/JurisDoctor/>
4. NUI Maynooth: PhD in Law (30 credits in class)
 - 4.1 <https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/study-maynooth/postgraduate-studies/courses/phd-law>
5. UCC: Doctorate in Philosophy (30 credits in class)
<https://www.ucc.ie/en/biochemistry/courses/postgraduate/phd/>

Professional Doctorates

- Are composed of taught and research elements
- Often cater to 'mid-career' or 'post-experience' professionals (Quality Assurance Authority 2015)
- Beyond being 'structured', they aim to "[embed] research in a reflective manner into another professional practice" ...
- ... "must meet the same core standards as 'traditional' doctorates in order to ensure the same high level of quality" (European University Association 2007)
 - An independent research project, examined in a viva
 - That "[demonstrates] deep knowledge and understanding of the field of study and originality of thought, either in the creation of new knowledge or in the novel application of existing knowledge" (Quality Assurance Authority 2015)
 - Is based on a "product [that] cannot be taught and must be developed by the learner" (Quality and Qualifications Ireland 2014)

In fact, ad hoc development and growth

Professional doctorates **cannot** be treated as if they are:

- PhDs (*'lite'*)
- Masters programmes *and nor as if they are research masters programmes*
- Executive training programmes

Given these alternative environments why are professional doctorates growing in number?

Drivers behind professional doctorates

- **'Supply' side**

- Law schools emphasising a social 'mission'
- Instrumental skills/employability policy imperatives
- An overall loss of faith in the PhD?
- Lest we forget: €€€€££££

- **'Demand' side**

- Professionals in specific sectors for/with whom the curriculum is designed (credentialists?)
- People who want to convert into a legal career (masochists?)
- People who wish to build their research skills and/or prefer a structured, collaborative environment

Challenges

- **Resourcing:** small programmes are expensive programmes: who is going to pay?
- **Student experience:** designing for
 - Student expectations in the context of their motives and aspirations (esp re appropriate skills)
 - Classroom time in the context of students' broader lives
 - Preparing for the transition into independent research: method, theory, thought and writing from the start
- **Value in collaboration**
 - Scholars co-producing knowledge and network-building with experienced professionals
 - Doctoral study in a more collaborative and supportive environment
- All this must be designed into a curriculum that is **sensitive to the students we get**

Thank you

References



European University Association (2007). *Doctoral Programmes in Europe's Universities: Achievements and Challenges*. Brussels: EUA.



Quality and Qualifications Ireland (2014). *Research Degree Programme Policy and Criteria*. Dublin: QQI.



Quality Assurance Authority (2015). *Doctoral Degree Characteristics Statement*. Gloucester: QAA.